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REPORTS & NEWS

Society for Hindu-Christian Studies Annual Meeting 1995.

THE SOCIETY'S ANNUAL meeting was held on 18 November 1995, at the Marriott Hotel, Philadelphia, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the AAR/SBL with approximately 40 people in attendance.

Reports were given by the Secretary, Lance Nelson, and by Harold Coward on behalf of treasurer Anantanand Rambachan, who was not present. Dr Coward also reported on the *Bulletin* of which he is editor. He noted that the *Bulletin*, which is the Society's major expense, was no longer dependent on donations from the United Church of Canada and the Jesuit Community in Germany to cover costs. However, he recommended increasing the membership dues by Cdn \$3 and US \$1 to cover shortfalls in exchange when converting small amounts of U.S. dollars. Both Lance Nelson

and Harold Coward acknowledged the volunteer assistance of Shirley Embra in Victoria for her help with the *Bulletin* and with the practical affairs of the Society.

It was agreed to present a Book Award every three years. The first book award ceremony and discussion will be held in 1997. Dan Sheridan, Judson Trapnell, and William Cenkner were appointed as the members of the Book Award Committee.

The last item of business was the election of Kana Mitra and Rachel McDermott to the Board of Directors of the Society.

Lance Nelson
Secretary
Society for Hindu-Christian Studies

Report on the Symposium on Evil. Satya Nilayam, Madras, 18-20 January 1996.

SATYA NILAYAM RESEARCH Institute, Madras, organized a three-day interdisciplinary symposium (18-20 January 1996) on the problem of evil. It was a dialogue between different traditions and disciplines trying to understand how each tradition grappled with this problem with its theological and philosophical presuppositions.

Prof. Raimundo Panikkar (Barcelona) delivered the keynote address. The contributors representing different traditions were: Prof. Pandurangi from Bangalore (Madhva), Bettina Bäumer from Austria (Kashmir Saivism), Nagaswamy from

Madras (Indian Myth and Iconography), Anand Amaladass (Indian tradition from the Tamil sources of literature), Rosario Rocha from Pune (Buddhism), Asghar Ali Engineer from Bombay (Islam), Ed Noort from the Netherlands (Biblical, OT), Herbert P. Herring from Madras (Western Philosophical tradition), Rudolf zur Lippe from Germany (Transcultural perspective), Lakshmi Chettur Herring from Madras (Human Genetics), Walter Fernandes from Delhi (Sociology).

It is curious that evil is a fact of life but it is still incomprehensible. Philosophers and theologians down the centuries have attempted to analyse the source and nature

of evil and formulated solutions according to their traditions and their historical contexts. But such solutions seem to be elusive. What is interesting is to see how each religious tradition understood this problem. One is surprised that the problem of theodicy was restricted to the God-human relationship in some traditions. The whole of creation is not taken into account and their sufferings do not figure in the discussion.

This symposium did not pretend to propose a new solution. But a study of such a problem enables us to be more sensitive to the presence of evil in and around us. And that is the task of a philosopher – to raise basic questions about the fact of suffering

and evil and to awaken the consciousness of people. This is an on-going process which is crucial for any thinker irrespective of the tradition he/she comes from. The task includes identifying such factors both in private and in public life and articulating them persuasively.

This symposium thus provided a forum for inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue on a basic problem of humanity and the participants were exposed to different traditions and disciplines. The papers will be published soon.

Anand Amaladass
Madras

Interfaith Dialogue – the South Carolina Experience. K. L. Seshagiri Rao and Sam Elisha.

The Background

Today there are tremendous opportunities for people of goodwill to draw closer as individuals and communities of faith. But there is also the potential for misunderstanding, mistrust and even strife if efforts are not made to counteract human propensities towards suspicion, discord, and hatred. Hence the Interfaith Dialogues.

Community Involvement

HIS International Inc. (Helping International Students) is a campus ministry which is located adjacent to the College of Business and Administration, University of South Carolina. It aims to create an environment for ongoing discourse and open discussions between members of various faith groups in and around Columbia. So far the efforts have been directed towards involving the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities in this enterprise. Starting in the fall of 1992, we have had a number of Dialogues, each of them attracting an average of 400 participants.

The Topics

The current series of dialogues has focused on the broader topic of "World Views on Humanity: Muslim, Hindu, and Christian Perspectives". The first sub-topic was entitled "Human Origins - Where Do We Come From?", which was discussed in November 1994. The second, "Human Purpose - Why Are We Here?" was covered in February 1995, and the last, "Human Destiny - Where Are We Going?" was held in April 1995. All these dialogues, as well as some others before them, were held at the Belle Auditorium of the College of Business Administration, University of South Carolina.

The Format

Each of three speakers is allowed 30 minutes in which to make a presentation. Afterwards, about 20 minutes is allowed for the speakers to ask each other questions, clarify their own comments, and add anything else to their formal speeches. This is followed by a period of questions from the floor, which are brought to the M.C. in

written form, who then passes them to each of the speakers by turn. The formal session is then over and the audience is invited to stay for refreshments and interactive dialogue. This latter is the highlight of our Dialogues because people of the three faith groups find it meaningful to stand around and enter into informal discussions, leading to a better understanding between individuals and communities.

Helpful Pointers

Choosing topics of common human concern. We have tried to select, in consultation with all groups, topics which would be informative, instructive, and meaningful.

Seeking participation of broader communities. We have stayed away from the usual forms of these dialogues which generally involve learned theologians or academics talking to each other at rather lofty levels, going over the heads of ordinary folks. It has been our desire to involve members of various faith groups in frank and open conversations so that they will be able to draw a little closer to each other at the level of their daily existence.

We feel that this is our distinctive approach, and we are proud of it.

Continuity of efforts. We feel it is not enough to hold one large, well-attended, and perhaps even "successful" dialogue. Matters of faith and belief are dearly and closely held tenets and precepts. For that reason, they tend to lead to in-group/out-group, or "us and them" attitudes which can only be loosened or dissolved over time. We like to think that we can discern some progress towards that end.

Suffice it to say that the communities and community leaders have been very cooperative in this endeavour. Religious leaders – such as the Imams of the local Mosques, Dr K. L. Seshagiri Rao, Chief Editor of Encyclopedia of Hinduism, Rev. Peter Cannon of HIS International – have participated at various stages of planning and execution of the event. All in all, these Dialogues have left a positive influence in the social and cultural life of Columbia, and have enriched our lives and enlarged our world views. Whereas a few steps do not a long journey make, they definitely propel us in the right direction.

News in Brief

MAJOR WORK ON the *Encyclopedia of Hinduism and Indic Religions*, a project of the India Heritage Research Foundation, and whose chief editor is Seshagiri Rao, is nearing completion. It will be published in 18 volumes the last of which will consist of an index and glossary. Some 10,000 entry items in twelve subject areas have been selected and approximately 500 scholars are researching and writing articles. This important reference work is scheduled for publication after 1998.

ISKCON Communications Journal welcomes submissions by members of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies on topics of

scholarly interest. For subscription or editorial information contact Anuttama Das, Communications Director, ISKCON, 10310 Olympia Drive, Potomac, MD 20854, U.S.A. Telephone 301-299-9707; FAX 301-299-5025.

A new periodical, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, will be published four times a year through World Heritage Press by the Institute of India Studies. It will feature interdisciplinary research essays in various fields including the social sciences, art and literature, economics, history and geography, philosophy and religion, etc. Inquiries and subscription information:

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Journals Division, World Heritage Press, 1270 St Jean St., Hyacinthe PQ J2S 8M2, Canada. Phone 514-771-0213; Fax 514-771-2776. Subscription rates including postage: Institutions US \$150.00; individuals US \$75.00.

The University of Calgary has announced the inauguration of its new Ph.D. program in the Department of Religious Studies. Areas of supervision include religious texts and commentaries, history of religious

movements and institutions, and interpretations of religions. For information contact the Graduate Coordinator, Lyle Eslinger, Department of Religious Studies, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive N.W., Calgary AB T2N 1N4, Canada. Phone: 403-220-5886; Fax 403-284-0848; E-mail eslinger@acs.ucalgary.ca or Web Site: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/faculties/HUM/RELS/U.Calgary.Rel.Stud.html>.